

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 33  
By Harwell

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Fred McFerrin Russell,  
legendary sports columnist for the Nashville  
Banner for almost seven decades.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of  
the passing of Fred McFerrin Russell, who for most of his life was the voice of sports in  
Nashville and Middle Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Fred Russell was born in Nashville on August 27, 1906, the son of John and  
Mable Lee McFerrin Russell; his father was a well-known traveling salesman who covered the  
mid-state for many years, and his mother was a popular composer in the South, who wrote such  
hit songs as *Sweet Violets So Blue*, *I Love You* and *The Vanderbilt University Waltz*; and

WHEREAS, the family moved to Wartrace when young Fred was only six weeks old and  
returned to Nashville when he was 13; he attended Duncan Preparatory School and spent time  
during summers at Sulphur Dell ball park before going on to undergraduate school at Vanderbilt  
University then earning his law degree from that prestigious school in 1927; and

WHEREAS, while attending Vanderbilt, Mr. Russell played on the 1925-26 baseball squads and was a member of the Kappa Sigma fraternity; he joined the firm of Real Estate Title Company and was admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1928; and

WHEREAS, when Guaranty Title Company bought the Real Estate Title Company a few months later, Fred Russell left the practice of law in 1929 to work for the *Nashville Banner*; he was first assigned to the police beat and then in September 1929 was assigned to cover Vanderbilt football, succeeding Ralph McGill, who had moved to the *Atlanta Constitution*; and

WHEREAS, in 1930 Mr. Russell was named sports editor for the *Banner* and three years later married Katherine "Kay" Wyche Early, his wife of 63 years; he was named vice-president in 1955 and sports director in 1969, all the while writing his popular daily column, Sideline Sidelights; and

WHEREAS, In 1981 Fred Russell stepped down as sports director but continued in semi-retirement as a columnist and vice-president - the latter designation then changed to sports editor emeritus; he continued with the *Banner* until its demise in 1998 and then worked briefly for the *Tennessean*; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Russell was an active and devout member of the West End United Methodist Church, which he served faithfully for many years as a member of the administrative board, and a founder and member of the John K. Benton Sunday School Class; he was a 33rd Degree Mason, Kappa Sigma's 1983 National Man of the Year, a former member of the Metro Board of Parks and Recreation, and a member of the Zodiac Club, the Coffee House Club, Omicron Delta Kappa, Sigma Delta Chi, Belle Meade Country Club, Belle Meade Lawn Bowling Association and the University Club; and

WHEREAS, When Vanderbilt University enlarged its stadium, the University named its press box for Fred Russell in response to the \$250,000 gift from his friends; the new Vanderbilt baseball press box also bears his name. Charles Cella of St. Louis, owner of Oaklawn Race Track and past president of the Thoroughbred Racing Associations donated \$500,000 to

Vanderbilt to further endow the Fred Russell-Grantland Rice Scholarship, a four-year grant for students with an interest in sport writing; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Russell was a founder of Harpeth Hall, along with the late William Waller, the late O. H. Ingram, the late Foskett Brown and the late Dr. Daugh Smith; he served on its original board in 1951; and

WHEREAS, Fred Russell produced an incisive, perceptive and witty prose that became the *Banner's* hallmark and was to become embedded in the sports memories of generations of Nashville and Middle Tennessee sports page readers. His approach was always fresh and different, his style was spare and devoid of the trite and obvious and frequently alight with gentle humor; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Russell was fond of practical jokes, but was always careful that they were never hurtful. He was the author of seven books, three of them on sports humor, and his 1957 semi-autobiographical *Bury Me in an Old Press Box* became a best seller; from 1949-62 he wrote the annual "Pigskin preview" for the *Saturday Evening Post*; and

WHEREAS, Fred Russell once said "One of the rich rewards of sport writing is the generous share of colorful and charming characters met along the way and the minimum of persons who take themselves too seriously." Among his many friends were Jack Dempsey, Bobby Jones, Red Grange and Bear Bryant, whom Mr. Russell recommended to Coach Red Sanders for an assistant coaching position at Vanderbilt; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Russell was the recipient of numerous awards and high honors from the sports profession, including the first Grantland Rice Memorial Award for "the sports writer in the United States who in his writing most nearly approaches the Rice tradition." Other notable honors and awards include his receipt of the first Nashville Sports Council's Lifetime Achievement Award which was named in his honor, the National Headliners Club Award in 1936, the Jake Wade Award in 1966, the U.S. Olympic Award for distinguished journalism in 1976, the Distinguished American Award from the National Football Foundation and Hall of fame in 1980, the Amos Alonzo Stagg Award from the American Football Coaches Association

in 1981, the Haight Award in 1983, the Red Smith Award from Associated Press Sports Editors in 1984, the Distinguished Service Award from the Liberty Bowl in 1986, Membership in the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame, along with his service as Chairman of the Honors Court of the National Football Hall of Fame, president of the Football Writers Association of America for 1965-66, Southern chairman of the Heisman Trophy Committee since 1953 and past national president of the Vanderbilt University Alumni Association; and

WHEREAS, deeply devoted to his family, Fred Russell enjoyed the loving companionship of his devoted wife Kay, who died in 1996, and was the proud parent of Carolyn Russell, Ellen Sadler, Kay Beasley and Lee Brown; he is also survived by eleven grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Fred Russell leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional sports writer, chronicler and observer of the humanities' triumphs and foibles and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we honor the memory of Fred McFerrin Russell, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our appreciation for the years of enjoyment that his excellent sports journalism brought to thousands of readers over his distinguished career as well as for the outstanding model of professional excellence that he provided for those who would follow.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Russell.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.